

## Our Pilgrim Father Founder's Monument

By THE REV. CANON ROBERT MERRY

It stands out like an index finger pointing high into the sky as it first comes into view at the left on the expressway precisely as we pass the sign "Entering Duxbury."

There is more than passing significance to this coincidence, as we shall see. It beckons to the mariner who leaves Minot's light to starboard on a clear afternoon and points the bow of his boat toward Gurnet. Seen at dawn on a day of good visibility from Pilgrim Monument in Provincetown, it looks like an exclamation point on the coastline of Cape Cod Bay, lying like a low bank of clouds on the horizon 18 miles away. It is the Myles Standish Monument. For most of us who live in Duxbury it provides, along with the King Caesar House and the John Alden House and the Old Burying Ground on Chestnut St., a pleasant historical experience for summer visitors. But a closer glimpse into the history of its building and its funding and into the life of the extraordinary man it commemorates reveals another of Duxbury's great stories.



### Statue of Myles Standish Monument.

The monument stands 250 feet above sea level to the top of Myles's head, itself 14 feet above the monument proper. The hill on which it stands was called "Captain's Hill" from early times as it was part of the land allotted to Myles Standish by the Plymouth Colony. The statue represents Captain Standish both as military and civilian leader, as he is dressed in his uniform while he performs the civilian act of handing the town its charter (hence the outstretched arm). The Colony also allotted land to Elder William Brewster and joining that of the Standishes. One can imagine lively conversational encounters between this devout scholar and graduate of Cambridge University whose library was the envy of all Colonial America, and this soldier statesman, this man of military skill and valor proven in his dealings not only with the Indians but his own countrymen. (On one occasion, for example, he ordered the execution of 3 Englishmen for the murder of an Indian.)

The Monument was built entirely by private subscription, 5 individuals contributing \$5,000 apiece to build it up to the 72 feet it reached by 1887. The blocks of stone quarried at Hallowell Quarries in Quincy weighed 3-5 tons apiece. They were barged to the stone pier that still stands at Howland's Landing and hauled by oxen up the hill from there. Horses were found too spirited and excitable to stand the long slow grinding drag.

Since we are speaking of a memorial to a man it may be valuable to take a few moments to tell who and what he was. He was born in Lancashire, England, near the village of Chorley, of yeomanry stock, his family having lived in the area since the Norman Conquest. The family had divided over the religious issue, some becoming Catholics and others Protestants and smirched parish records indicate kulduggery in family strife for 300 years. This may be why Myles never took much interest in religion, even staying aloof from the Pilgrim Parish in its new beginnings.

As a young man he volunteered in Queen Elizabeth's armed forces she sent to Flanders to assist the Dutch in their war of independence from Spain. Here it was that he became friendly with the little band of religious refugees who had fled Scrooby, England, and taken up their lives for 15 years in

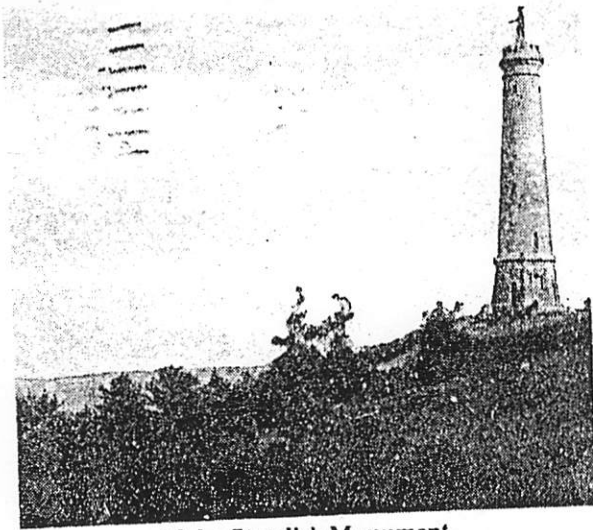
Leyden. So it was only natural that when plans began to jell for a trip to the New World and a new beginning they would turn to this able lieutenant in Her Majesty's service. His military skills were widely regarded all through his life, especially after he came to America. In fact a short time before his death at 72, he was called upon to head an expedition to deal with the Dutch who had moved into Connecticut and built a fort and trading post at Winsor. Happily a conference resulting in the "Treaty of Hartford (1650)" made military action unnecessary.

Records are sparse and legends unreliable, but we do know that as John Alden was a widely reputed conciliator among warring Indian tribes and colonists on the Cape and up the coast as far as the Kennebec River, so Myles Standish was instrumental in protecting the little colony from Indian massacre and from the ravages of privateers. He made a trip to England in 1625 in a vain effort to get more help in administering the colony, and in 1628 he went again this time to pledge with 8 others the 1800 pounds to pay off the loan English merchants had made to the Plymouth Venture. He was known as a shrewd bargainer and a hard-line negotiator. It is to his genius that much of the independence of the Plymouth colony in the early days was due. It must have been sad indeed that despite his indifference to religious pressures he saw the gradual encroachment of Puritan theology, which would finally, a few years after his death, swallow up the little Colony so that only scholars and researchers today realize the theological gulf that separated the Pilgrims from the Puritans.

Myles had a tender side to his nature. He was one of the 7 who had been able to keep on their feet that disastrous winter of 1620 when half of the little band died. He had known personal sorrow, too, in the death of his wife, Rose, a month after their arrival. He later married Barbara, whose family origins are obscure, and they had 7 children, 4 of whom attained adulthood and made their contribution to life in Colonial America as did their descendants. The name "Standish" dots Duxbury town reports for many years back, Alexander having been town clerk most of his life.

At this point it must be clear to the reader that this man is not the kind of person who would send an emissary in his name on such a personal errand as a proposal of marriage. The Encyclopedia Britannica says "Longfellow's 'Courtship of Myles Standish' has no basis in fact." It is a good story till we read the character of the man. Also it should be said about his wife Barbara as Dorothy Wentworth says about Priscilla Alden (I paraphrase): These Pilgrim women were not demure and shy maidens with no mind or ability to handle practical affairs; they were heads of large farms with all the problems that go with that and had to manage huge households while their husbands were off on state business for weeks at a time. Few world cultures manifest this kind of accomplishment on the part of women and it is only fitting and proper that close by Plymouth Rock, there stands a statue in tribute to their skill and devotion.

The building of the monument took shape first in 1861 in the mind of J. Henry Stickney of Baltimore who had read and studied the life of the great captain and remarked, "There is a man who deserves a monument," and began at once to raise funds among his friends. Groundbreaking took place on Aug. 17, 1871, 10 years later. Ten thousand people came to Duxbury for the ceremony, most by the new railroad, opened for that occasion. Great excitement swept over the entire area of Duxbury and Kingston and Plymouth as the railroad promised to open up new channels of commerce to replace the diminishing shipbuilding industry. The cornerstone was laid on May 4, 1872, with another overflow crowd on hand and work proceeded under the leadership of Nathaniel Adams and L. Miles Standish to a height of 72 feet when funds ran out. The 6 New England states contributed stones from their own quarries for the archway, President Grant himself providing the keystone from the Federal Government.



Myles Standish Monument.

The town celebrated its 250th anniversary in 1887 with much fanfare and pageantry, cranes and derricks and random blocks of granite dominating the proceedings. Justin Winsor (who has written his own history of Duxbury) gave the address of the day. Ten years earlier he had been asked by President Eliot of Harvard to leave the Boston Public Library as temporary superintendent and become the Harvard librarian. He spent some time in his address describing the virtues of our hero. He reminded his hearers of his military successes in Flanders and how he single-handedly braved the Indian braggart Pecksuot in his cabin at Wessagusset and dealt justly in his relations with all he met, emphasizing that he had a quick temper, but a tender heart. He loved supremely one book he brought from England, "Caesar's Commentaries," and enjoyed describing his campaigns in Gaul. Winsor told how Myles went to the Great and General Court of the Commonwealth with a few supporters to secure the incorporation of the town.

The Honorable Stephen Allen was also present and told this story of a conversation between Elder Brewster and Myles Standish after "Meeting" one Sunday. "This soil is free," said Elder Brewster; "no man hath claim thereon. In old England a poor man may starve right on his mother's bosom. There may be stores of fish in the river and bird and fowl flying and deer running by and yet though a man's children be crying for bread, and he catch a fish or snare a bird, he shall be snatched and hanged. We'll make a land where every man shall have his portion of our

good mother earth, with no lords or Bishops to harry or restrain and worry with taxes and tythes." To which Myles replied, "Amen, Brother, and thereto I give my best endeavors with sword and buckler."

Whether it was the shame brought to minds and hearts over the uncompleted monument on this anniversary or not, the fact is funds began to pour in and the stone work, complete with Myles on top, was completed in 1889, and with a different color granite as we all can see. The Commonwealth came through in 1898 and 1899 and built the observation platform at the top and the grilled iron stairway. So now the monument was completed to everyone's delight and it only remained to build the roadway and parklet and the stone columns and beautiful granite steps all of which were done with the income from a bequest from Stickney's estate, completing his dream of over a quarter of a century before.

The monument has always been a symbol of Duxbury to me, and I remember well how everyone in town felt personally hurt when it was struck by lightning in 1921, and Myles's head and arm broken off and several of the granite steps dislodged. I look at it every morning over my breakfast coffee, as it forms with Captain's Hill the subject of our picture window. But I do have some concerns, not about the

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My concern is about us -- the spirit of the age in which we live. Laurence Bradford in his lovely story, "Visiting the Pilgrim Town of Duxbury," has a full chapter on the monument. Among the points he makes is the fact that this is the highest monument to an individual this side of Baltimore. The words "To an individual" really hit me hard. Could this kind of monument be built today? We live in an egalitarian society where the great crime is to "stand out in a crowd." We worship the "group." "Peer pressure" is our only authority. "Social promotion" has taken the place of the "pursuit of excellence" in our schools. We live in the day of the non-hero: A Boston school teacher was fired because she refused to pass a student who had done little of the course work. She was told it would do him emotional harm to hold him back. What has become of our allegiance to individual merit, and the training of the individual and the doctrine that society exists -- government exists -- all exist to assist in the liberation of the individual self? Can we have a first rate society without the excellence of the individuals? Of course we don't want a return to the rugged individualism of the 1890s and the neglect of our duty to help others along the way. But to me this monument stands as a rebuke to the excesses of "group" idolatry whether it is in unionism or education or politics or social life.

Some of this feeling is contained in the final paragraph of General Sargent's address at the groundbreaking ceremony. "In grateful memory we consecrate this spot of earth to a monument of the great Captain. May its shadow fall upon his grave! For 2 centuries the stars looked down upon it. At the moment of the night the circling moon may point it out with shadowy finger no mortal knows. No mortal ear can hear the secret whispered to the night. Beneath this spot lies all of a hero that could die.

"High as that may tower over headland and bay, deep as its foundation stones may rest, brightly as it may gleam in the rising or the setting of the sun upon the mariner returning in the very furrow that the keel of the Mayflower made, the principles of common sense, a citizen soldier's education for a citizen soldier's work, the principles of moral truth, manly honesty, prudent energy, fidelity incorruptible, courage undaunted, all the qualities of manhood that compel unflinching execution of the state's behest, are firmer and higher and brighter still. And to crown them all is reverence to the Supreme Executive of Earth and Heaven, who knows no feebleness of heart or hand, and Whose great purpose moved the war-worn Pilgrim's feet to seek his home on this rockbound continent where unceasing waves of 2 unfettered oceans roar the choral hymn of freedom."

Or we could say with Longfellow:

"Lives of great men all remind us, we can make  
our lives sublime  
And departing leave behind us footprints in the sands  
of time.  
Footprints that perhaps another sailing over life's  
solemn main  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother  
May take heart again."